

Chick-fil-A upsets UT's LGBT

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Staff Writer

When it was revealed earlier this month that the new dining establishment in the Presidential Court Building would be a second Chick-fil-A, not everyone on campus was pleased.

Those that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, and those that support the LGBT community are all a bit distressed by the presence of not one, but soon to be two Chick-fil-As.

This past summer, controversy arose when Dan Cathy, Chick-fil-A's chief operating officer, made statements against same-sex marriage.

Anger also arose from LGBT support groups over Chick-fil-A's charity endeavor, the WinShape Foundation, which donates millions of dollars to organizations that, amongst other things, are anti-LGBT, such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council.

The resulting uproar led to both protests against the restaurant chain as well as support in the form of "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day."

While the national fervor may have died

down, there is still some resentment and even anger among the LGBT community at UT.

Donna Braquet, center coordinator at the OUTreach LGBT & Ally Resource Center, has seen many of the LGBT students come through the center with a variety of thoughts about the two Chick-fil-As on campus.

"You could probably find people on either side," Braquet said. "(There are) some people who would really hold a grudge about this and then some people who are gay themselves and (are) going to get some chicken nuggets.

"Of course, I can't speak for the entire community," she added.

Braquet said that while several of UT's LGBT and ally students have gone so far as to resolve to never eat at Chick-fil-A again, some are concerned about it in other ways. One student, she noted, was worried about being employed at the restaurant because Chick-fil-A was the only place the student could find available work.

"... They are concerned how their friends might perceive them working for a company that is outwardly anti-gay," said Braquet.



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Students pass by the construction of the new Chick-fil-A at Presidential Court Monday. Chick-fil-A will replace the previous IHOP and should be completed in October.

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For Braquet herself, she does find the overall situation disappointing, but believes that as a private company, Chick-fil-A can do as it pleases. She figures that most major companies conduct some behavior that a person could find unethical.

"It is a little disappointing, but I think just about every company lobbies with their money," Braquet said. "I think probably some companies give just as much to conservative groups as they might progressive groups. I guess that the most I could hope for is that there is some sort of awareness."

Braquet hopes that if anything is to come from the situation, it is that the LGBT community and its allies will become more politically aware and use their frustration and motivation to go beyond just organizing personal boycotts and Facebook rants.

"If they're going to boycott and protest Chick-fil-A for their views that they hold," Braquet said, "then use your vote to also send a message ... (whether you) want this to be a more progressive country that's inclusive of LGBT issues or not."

Sara Konsavage, senior in sociology, LGBT ally and secretary for the LAMBDA Student Union, feels that the chicken juggernaut will

not suffer too much.

"I don't support them and I don't like what they are doing with their money," Konsavage said. "But I also think that a lot of people are still going to be eating there, and that's their right."

"Logistically," she added, "if you did not purchase product from every company that did something you did not agree with you wouldn't eat anywhere, you wouldn't have any clothing. Certain companies have really great same-sex partner benefits, but they might also participate in child labor..."

Caitlin Miller, senior in philosophy and president of LAMBDA, was particularly upset about the organizations that Chick-fil-A donates money to through WinShape. She insists that her problem with Chick-fil-A and its supporters is not an issue of free speech, but is rather an issue with the apathy that the consuming public would appear to have about Chick-fil-A's charity.

"I'm not saying that they don't have a right to donate to whoever they want," Miller said. "I'm just saying that you should be informed on where your money is going. When you spend your money at an organization like Chick-fil-A, your money is a vote. And you're voting for the organizations that they give money to."

Miller was also disheartened by how even students who say that they are LGBT-friendly will still

dine at Chick-fil-A.

"If you really research where their money is going and you still claim to be an ally, there's a problem," Miller said. "You can't know where the money is going and then go to Chick-fil-A afterward, and claim to be an ally."

"If this organization donated to the KKK, would you go there?" Miller added. "Probably not, and if you did then ... you just don't care and that's wrong. Why would you not care? This is the civil rights movement of the LGBT community."

In an interview earlier this month, Matthew Perry and Mary Patterson, marketing coordinator and marketing director for UT Dining Services, respectively, said that Dining Services's decision to install a new Chick-fil-A resulted from student demand, and that there was little-to-no protest about it.

"When we've talked to students," Patterson said, "... their response has always been that they're really excited for Chick-fil-A. ... The positive reaction from the students overwhelmed all of that."

"No matter what brand it is, (it) will have positive or negative opinions from customers," said Perry. "So our focus with Chick-fil-A is that we saw the demand. We saw that students love Chick-fil-A—they love their food."

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